

Private Ownership and Public Good Provision in English Woodlands

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Abstract There is increasing emphasis on multipurpose forestry within UK national and regional forest strategies, with the aim of co-delivering the social, environmental and economic benefits of woodlands. Private woodland ownership is also changing, with an increase in owners without a farming or forestry background. However, there is little substantive evidence relating to the motivations of private woodland owners and, in particular, their ability and willingness to deliver public goods. A qualitative study is adopted, using semi-structured interviews in three areas in England, to address this theoretical gap. Exploratory findings indicate that private woodland owners have a diverse range of objectives, motivations and management regimes which influence the potential for public good delivery. It is shown that some private woodland owners, such as those less motivated by economic return, may be better placed than others to deliver certain public goods; that conflicts can arise between the provision of recreation and nature conservation, especially in smaller woodlands; and that many private woodland owners are sceptical about becoming involved in grant schemes which may help foster public good provision in the private sector.

Keywords Qualitative · Private woodland owner · Motivations · Non-market benefits

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Introduction

Within the forest strategies for England, Scotland and Wales is the recognition that traditional forestry, with its emphasis on timber production, is being replaced with multiple uses that provide social, environmental and economic benefits together (FC 2001a; FC 2006a; Defra 2007). This shift reflects wider rural restructuring and discourses surrounding the multifunctional or post-productivist countryside, which is increasingly seen as a place of consumption and protection as well as production (Ilbery and Bowler 1998; Marsden 1998; Bowler and Ilbery 1999; Mather 2001; Kristensen et al. 2004; Slee 2005; Holmes 2006; Mather et al. 2006). Although it is implicitly acknowledged that woodlands have always provided ecological functions, there is now more explicit recognition of the public good values generated by woodlands—including recreation, biodiversity, landscape and carbon sequestration (Willis et al. 2003). Indeed, these public good values from woodlands and forests, estimated by Willis et al. (2003) to be around £1 billion annually in Great Britain, can often be greater than their private good value (e.g. revenue from timber sales) on particular areas of woodland.

As a result of this shift in the rural sector, farmers and other primary producers (such as foresters) are seeking new ways of making a living (Ilbery 1998), with fewer owners relying on forest activities for their income. An increasing proportion of woodland is now in private hands with almost half (47%) of woodland in England owned by private individuals, a further 14% owned by private businesses, 7% by charities, less than 1% by timber businesses and 0.4% in community ownership (FC 2001b). Less than a third of woodland is in public ownership, 22% of which is in the hands of the Forestry Commission and 6% owned by local authorities. In contrast to the distribution of public forestry, much of the private forestry estate is located in the lowlands close to urban areas. In theory, this spatial distribution provides opportunities for delivering high public good benefits, such as landscape, biodiversity and recreation. Indeed, recent studies reveal that the general public value woodland and open space close to where they live, both explicitly for recreation and also intrinsically for conservation and environmental protection (O'Brien 2004; Slee et al. 2004; Ward Thompson et al. 2005). In order to influence and encourage the sustainable management of woodlands and forests in England, the UK government's English Woodland Grant Scheme, launched in July 2005, provides a suite of grants to financially assist woodland owners to manage their woodlands. Grants are available for preparing management plans, woodland regeneration and improvement, as well as for new woodland planting, with the emphasis on supporting management activities that enhance and increase public benefits in woodlands.

However, private woodland owners are not a homogeneous group and, with urban wealth increasingly being used for amenity-driven purchases of rural land, there is now a diverse mix of traditional, agricultural and non-agricultural or semi-urban woodland owners (Harrison et al. 2002). Anecdotal evidence suggests that almost 50% of rural land purchasers have no previous experience of rural land management, yet the motives for owning woodland are poorly understood. If public policy objectives relating to public good provision are to be effective, they must be

consistent with the underlying motivations and values of the woodland owner (Ingermarson et al. 2006; Church and Ravenscroft 2008).

In response, this paper aims to explore the ability of private woodland owners to deliver public good benefits. The objectives of the study were to (i) determine motivations for woodland ownership and how owners use their woodlands; (ii) explore how owners manage their woodlands; and (iii) explore owners' attitudes towards the delivery of public good benefits in their woodlands and potential barriers to such delivery. The following section first outlines the theoretical concept of public goods and property rights, and how owner perceptions of these issues may shape their willingness to adopt policies for public good provision. Following a description of the research methods in the subsequent section, qualitative findings are presented and discussed in the context of the potential opportunities for, and threats to, enhancing public good delivery in private woodlands in England.

Public Goods and the Private Woodland Owner

In the past, most studies used to inform forest policy took a rather narrow view of the economics of forestry, placing emphasis mainly on the productivity and profitability of timber (Kula 1986). More recently, studies have developed a broader framework for the evaluation of the economics of forestry, recognising that a range of economic benefits exist, not just timber production (Pearce 1991; price 1997; Willis et al. 2003; CJC Consulting 2004). These studies suggest that the inclusion of non-timber values can increase the economic rate of return from forestry (Dickie and Rayment 2001) and not just increase intrinsic values. It has been argued that, in lowland Britain at least, the ecological, aesthetic and recreational benefits of woodlands and forests can often outweigh their commercial value for timber (Pitt 1992; Innes 1993; Matthews 1994; Selman 1997; Brainard et al. 2001).

In economics, these non-market benefits are called public goods. A public good is something that is impossible to produce for private profit because private sector providers are unable to acquire profit from its provision (Turner et al. 1994; Hanley et al. 1997; Bateman et al. 2005). However, the extent to which a public good remains as such depends on the distribution of property rights (Slee 2006). For example, legislation granting public right of access to woodlands in Scotland under the Land Reform Act 2003 turned a notionally private good unambiguously into a public good. Access to woodlands in England is more limited, based on the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (woodlands and forest remain outside the legislation of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000), and the special case of dedication which enables landowners to voluntarily dedicate long-term access to their land.

The issue of property rights is also of fundamental importance in understanding both the nature of, and solutions to, environmental economic problems (Brown 2007). In the case of recreational access, Church and Ravenscroft (2008) suggest that woodland owners' sense of ownership and perceived property rights are central in determining their decisions regarding access. These attitudes are formed against a backdrop of historical conflict over recreational access to land in England.

According to Shoard (1999), allowing or denying access is connected to a strong sense of ownership and identity with the land. Sime et al. (1993) concluded that maintaining rights of ownership and control is important to owners and will influence their decisions regarding public good provision and their response to public policy incentives.

But who are these private woodland owners? In England, private woodland owners are a diverse mix of traditional estate owners, farmers, wealthy individuals who capitalised on the tax incentives offered for woodland planting in the 1980s and hobby owners. Many of these latter owners are motivated less by economic gain and more by socially-oriented objectives, such as nature conservation, or personal enjoyment (Boon and Meilby 2005). Increasingly, woodland is purchased for its social or positional value, as demonstrated by recent prices paid for woodland in the south of England (£8–12,000 per hectare, Tillhill and Savills 2008). Slee (2006) refers to the positional good argument, which asks whether it is necessary to financially support, through policy means, the delivery of environmental benefits when affluent woodland owners are likely to continue to manage woodlands, at a loss, as a hobby activity for their personal amenity. Indeed, it seems that financial incentives in the form of grants are unlikely to attract such owners due to their desire to maintain control of decisions regarding the management of their woodland.

So, this heterogeneous mix of owner types presents a challenge for policy makers: essentially, how can public policy objectives be delivered through such a diverse forest estate? In order to address the problem, a number of researchers have attempted to classify private woodland owners. These have generally been in non-UK settings, such as mainland Europe or the United States, where forest ownership structures differ (Karpinnen 1998; Dhubhain et al. 2006). Post-communist Europe has also provided considerable literature on the effects of changing forest ownership (Mizaraitė and Mizaras 2005).

Some studies on private forest owners link owner characteristics (such as values, attitudes and management objectives) to particular behavioural patterns (Hogl et al. 2005) such as harvesting behaviour (Kuuluvainen et al. 1996), reforestation methods (Karpinnen 2005), participation in subsidy schemes (Madsen 2003) or owner ability to follow principles of ecosystem management (Creighton et al. 2002; Jacobsen 2002). Often the distinction is made between ‘agricultural forest owner’ and ‘non-agricultural forest owner’ (Kurtz and Lewis 1981; Jones et al. 1995; Loenstedt 1997; Karpinnen 1998), with the ‘agricultural forest owner’ representing the traditional landowner with a farming background, whose forest may or may not provide a large proportion of their income. ‘Non-agricultural forest owners’ encompass the remainder—i.e. those who do not have a farming background. This group is likely to rely on sources of income other than their forest (Kvarda 2004), and are likely to live in more urban areas, perhaps some distance from their woodland. Accordingly, their management activities may be constrained by a lack of time, experience or access to machinery (Kvarda 2004). The ‘non-agricultural’ owner may view their woodland from a more socially-oriented perspective, with concern for their own personal enjoyment, utilisation of timber for their own needs and preserving the resource for future generations.

While there is an extensive international literature on private forest owners in general, there are relatively few studies that address changes in the nature of forest ownership and the motivations of so-called ‘non-agricultural forest owners’. Indeed, forest owner typologies have been criticised for their lack of information in terms of forest policy or suggestions for practice (Suda et al. 2001). By differentiating forest owners in terms of their agricultural practices or farming background, the classification is limited to ‘farmers’ and ‘the rest’. The difficulty in such terminology is that it describes what the owner is *not* (i.e. not a farmer), not what the owner *is*, which is not very precise and has limited use for policy formulation in terms of enhancing public good provision.

Church and Ravenscroft (2008) conclude that owners’ control and perceived rights over their land are strongly associated with owners’ willingness to adopt changing public policy practices: “While some owners may be willing to embrace change, others are only prepared to deliver public benefit if it does not compromise their existing values and motives for owning land” (pg. 14). Similarly, in a study in Finland, Horne concludes that for conservation policies to be socially accepted and cost effective, the diverse preferences and objectives of woodland owners need to be considered (Horne 2006). The personal motivations of some private woodland owners may well be in line with forest policy objectives and enable the ‘non-agricultural forest owner’ to deliver public good benefits from their woodland holding. However, others may perceive the objectives of policy approaches as being contrary to their own objectives and so will resist change. For example, where woodland is used to provide privacy and personal amenity for the owner it may not be suitable for the delivery of some public goods, most notably public access. Recreation is, therefore, likely to be the most under-supplied of public goods due to private landowners’ reluctance to increase public access. In turn, the extent to which woodland owner motivations deliver, tolerate or oppose public good delivery is an important issue.

While there is a body of literature examining private woodland owner motivations in Europe and the US, little research has been conducted in the UK. Indeed, while some researchers have explored ownership motivation and management activities in the UK (see, for example, Church and Ravenscroft 2008; Sime et al. 1993), very few have specifically addressed owner willingness and ability to deliver public goods. This paper describes an exploratory study that seeks to assess the relationship between owner motivations and public good delivery in English woodlands. The following section outlines the methods used and the sampling strategy.

Research Methods

A qualitative, exploratory approach was adopted to uncover the range of motivations and objectives of private woodlands owners that may influence public good provision. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 private woodland owners in three study areas in South-east England: Sevenoaks District, Hastings Borough and Rother District. The South-east of England was selected

since it is a highly populated area, with much woodland in private ownership but little available for informal recreation (CLA 1999; Curry and Ravenscroft 2001; WT 2004). The scope of the study and its qualitative, exploratory nature mean that the findings are illustrative rather than representative. Nevertheless, the study areas were selected to help provide a broad range of woodland owners, and to represent woodlands located near to urban areas as well as more rural woodlands. A summary of each area, in terms of land use and characteristics is given in Table 1 and woodland cover in Table 2.

Sevenoaks District is located within the green belt in Kent, with much of the area having a rural character. There are many picturesque villages and large areas of countryside. The district is very accessible to London, so contains a large commuter population and is relatively wealthy. Fifteen percent of the district is wooded, three quarters of which is broadleaved or mixed (FC 2006b). Hastings Borough is a sea-side town in East Sussex; it is a mainly urban borough, with little open countryside, although there are some remnants of ancient woodland. Ten percent of the area is wooded, mostly broadleaves (FC 2006b). Rother District has a mainly rural character, with most of the area lying within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Its small towns and villages reflect its rolling downland character. Nineteen percent of the area is woodland, with half being broadleaved (FC 2006b). The rest is largely made up of conifer plantations and coppiced woodland.

The size of woodlands owned by participants in this study ranged from 2.5 ha to 300 ha, with the median size being 12.5 ha. Duration of ownership ranged from 3 years to over 100 years (in a family estate), with the mean being almost 25 years and the median 15 years. The woodlands included mixed and broadleaved woods, many of which had been coppiced in the past. Six of the woodlands in this study were in some form of grant scheme (Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) or comprised Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)¹).

The sampling strategy first involved identifying woodland owners in the study areas. This was achieved through a combination of strategies, involving contacting relevant organisations, personal knowledge and advertising. Since there is no current data on private woodland and forest owner types, it was not possible to select participants purposefully depending on their management type, production process or background in forestry. The sampling procedure was, therefore, based around 3 criteria: (1) woodland size; (2) relative accessibility to a metropolitan centre; and (3) use of a professional advisor and/or already in an existing grant scheme (e.g. WGS). The sample was selected to ensure a range of different sized woodlands, located near to, or remote from, urban centres. Owners with woodlands both in active management (defined by their enrolment in grant schemes) and not managed (no grant scheme) were interviewed.

The semi-structured interview schedule was divided into three main sections and included questions on general information such as size and type of woodland; reasons for ownership and management activities; and views on public good provision in private woodlands. Two interview schedules were prepared: one for

¹ Protected area designated for its rare or unique biodiversity.

Table 1 Summary of case study areas

Location	Sevenoaks District			Hastings Borough		Rother District	
	West Kent. Borders Greater London, Surrey and Sussex			East Sussex, on coast. Borders Rother District.		East Sussex, bordered by the coast, Hastings Borough, Wealden District, Tunbridge Wells Borough, Ashford Borough and Shepway District.	
Area (ha)	36,777			2,972 ^b		51,800 ^c	
Population	109,000 ^a			85,029 ^b		90,000 ^c	
Woodland % of area	15			10		19	
% woodland in grant scheme	1			0		30	
Characteristics	Within Green Belt, small villages and large areas of countryside.			Mainly urban, little open countryside.		Most lies within High Weald AONB. Rural nature.	
Notable public woodlands	Farningham Woods, Shoreham Woods, Stubbs Woods			Church in the Wood Local Nature Reserve, Guestling Wood		Battle Great Wood, Brede High Woods, Darwell Wood, Vinehall Forest, Beckley Wood, Flatropers Wood	

^a SDC (2006); ^b NS (2001); ^c RDC (2006)

Table 2 Woodland types and extent in the case study areas >2 ha by Interpreted Forest Type at 31 March 2002

Woodland type	Sevenoaks (ha)	Hastings (ha)	Rother (ha)
Broadleaved	2732	252	4652
Conifer	338	0	1348
Coppice	197	8	1427
Coppice with standards	33	0	353
Felled	400	2	779
Ground prepared	10	0	17
Mixed	1277	4	758
Shrub	135	15	19
Young trees	228	7	397
Total	5352	288	9751

NIWT data supplied by FC (2006b)

owners who managed their woodland and one for owners who did not. The interview explored woodland owners' reasons for owning a woodland, attitudes towards woodland management, knowledge of woodland management, where they go for advice on woodland management, management activities carried out and attitudes towards public good benefits from woodlands.

The data from the interviews consisted of the interview transcripts and notes made by the researcher. These were analysed using the qualitative software NUD*IST. Each transcript was examined and coded according to participants responses to the questions. The emergent patterns in responses were recorded and used to profile the participating woodland owners. Since this study was exploratory and consisted of a small sample, the results cannot be considered representative of the total private woodland owner population. However, they do raise some interesting issues that make a useful contribution to the debate and identify some pertinent areas for further research.

Results and Analysis

The results of the analysis are presented in this section. Owner motivations, constraints on woodland management and attitudes towards public good delivery and forest policy are presented, prior to a discussion of how these findings might impact on policy and act as a catalyst for future research.

Owner Characteristics and Motivations

Five woodland owner types were identified by the analysis, defined by owners' stated background in woodland ownership (e.g. came as part of farm, amenity purchase, tree grower etc.) and the type of woodland management that they carry out (Table 3).

As can be seen from the data in Table 3, twelve of those interviewed were classified as new woodland owners (either resident or absent), four were traditional

Table 3 Five woodland owner types identified

Woodland owner type	Motivations for management	Characteristics	No. in study	Total woodland (ha)	Average holding (ha)
Community woodland owner	Public amenity	Health of woodlands also important	2	24.4	12.2
Farmer woodland owner	Public amenity, conservation, sporting shooting	Woodland needs to be financially neutral/profitable	2	30	15
Traditional woodland owner	Maintain health of woodland, preserve timber value, sporting shooting, conservation	Not much management as not profitable	4	438	110
Resident new woodland owner	Personal enjoyment, wildlife conservation, health of woodland, preserve timber value	Often carries out much of the work themselves	7	115.7	17
Absentee new woodland owner	Personal enjoyment, wildlife conservation, health of woodland	Little management but generally uses contractor. Light tasks carried out by owner	5	32.7	7

woodland owners, two were farmers and two comprised of community groups. However, the largest area of woodland, in terms of land cover, was owned by traditional estate woodland owners. This is because these estates generally had large woodlands, while the new woodland owners' holdings in this study were relatively small, ranging from 2.5 ha to 40 ha. Holding size of the resident owners was greater than that of absentee owners, with a mean holding size of 17 and 7 ha respectively. This may be because absentee new woodland owners tended to buy their woodland through land agents, where larger plots are often divided up into smaller 4–5 ha plots and sold to separate purchasers. In general, resident new woodland owners either acquired their woodland when they purchased their property or subsequently purchased adjoining woodland from a farmer. These woodlands tended to be larger as they were not divided up for sale in the same way as small individual plots.

As shown in column two of Table 3, it is difficult to pigeon-hole owners according to their background in terms of the range of motivations they may have for managing and owning their woodlands. The community woodland owners in this study indicated that they manage their woodlands primarily for public amenity; with the health of the woodlands and wildlife as secondary drivers of management. For example, the public may feel that large piles of deadwood makes the woodland look untidy or present a hazard. While providing habitat piles is important, public safety has first priority: *“We don’t want manicured woodlands but at the same time you have got to think about the visual impact and you have got to think about the safety angle”* (Community Owner).

The farmers indicated that they manage for public amenity, conservation and sometimes sport shooting. One farm woodland owner described his woodland as “a

bloody nuisance”, because “it’s woodland, and we’re not going to get anything out of that. We’ve got to put our energy into what earns us a profit.” He went on to argue that if woodlands were more profitable, farmers would be more inclined to manage them.

The traditional woodland owners stated that they manage their woodland primarily to maintain the health of the woodland, preserve the timber value and for shooting. Since timber values are low, little management now occurs in these woodlands, other than for sport shooting or to maintain the health of the woodlands. When managing a large estate, money has to be allocated to areas of the estate with the best return and so woodlands are only minimally managed. One traditional woodland owner explained: “Put it this way, there is no incentive for us to apply for grants and manage the woodlands. As far as we’re concerned, it’s pretty much dead ground, financially.” Another argued: “I don’t think that it’s a good plan to have any enterprise if it’s divorced from some profit motive.”

Both resident and absentee new woodland owners stated that they manage their land for personal enjoyment, to maintain the health of woodlands and for the conservation of wildlife. Several of the resident new woodland owners also managed to preserve and enhance timber values. Some of the new woodland owners have always lived in the countryside, but are recent woodland owners. Others were urban dwellers who have moved out to the countryside for a different way of life. One new woodland owner explained: “I loved the idea. I was a typical London person. I grew up in the country. My dad was a farmer, so I loved the, sort of, rural environment. I feel very familiar with it. But not really woods...we had a postage stamp back garden [in London]. We lived in a very urban area. We just wanted space. We had kids and we just felt really claustrophobic...That why we wanted to go from one extreme to the other. As a complete reaction, I think, to how claustrophobic and lack of space and noise-polluted our life was.” Many of these new woodland owners stated that profitability from their woodlands is not a primary objective. They are interested in managing their woodlands in order to conserve the natural environment and increase biodiversity, and many state that personal enjoyment is a large factor.

Constraints on Woodland Management

While the woodland owners sought information and advice on the best management prescriptions for their woodland, almost all of those interviewed indicated that their management activities were tempered by a lack of resources. Thus, their actual management activities were perhaps less linked to their knowledge base, but more to their financial ability to carry out the desired management.

As well as the financial constraints relating to woodland management, the owners indicated that damage by pests was also a major concern. Such damage cost money in either protecting the trees from damage, or re-planting after damage. The most common pests were deer and squirrels, with rabbits causing some damage in some woodlands.

Many of the interviewees indicated that they would like to manage their woodlands better if they had the resources. Such management might include, for

example, coppicing, clearing invasive species and replanting. Many also stated that if timber had a higher value they would be more inclined to actively manage their woodlands. Although most of the new woodland owners were not necessarily interested in making a profit from their woodland, they suggested that if there was a market for timber or wood products, woodlands could be better managed. Thus, perhaps, if there was an economic value in the arisings from woodland management this would effectively enable woodlands to pay for themselves.

One resident new woodland owner manages his chestnut coppice woodland on a 15 year rotation, cutting one acre a year. The timber is used for fencing, hedge-laying, bean poles and firewood. This owner is installing a wood boiler in his house in order to become almost carbon-neutral. He commented:

If you work it right, a woodland is fantastically economic... If you think about it, it's an entirely sustainable fuel source. It provides almost everything you need for fencing. I mean you could build with the stuff as well. People do.

This owner also felt that many woodlands are under-utilised:

I think with woodland people seem to be blind to the economic benefits, I mean the fact that we will not need to have to pay for any heating for 6 months of the year or hot water strikes me as being a very, very major incentive to manage a wood properly. So if you get that then you are going to manage your wood properly, I mean, you are going to make sure you've got access so you are going to keep the rides clear. You're going to make sure you coppice enough each year to provide your fuel so you'll probably automatically coppice in rotation...In cutting you're going to leave offcuts that you can't move lying around so you're going to be creating rotting wood piles for bugs and beetles. Just the economic lure is going to make that work.

Public Good Provision

Table 4 shows the variety and distribution of responses from woodland owners when asked about the perceived public good benefits from their woodland. This indicates the range of benefits that the different types of woodland owners perceive their woodlands to be providing.

Only one absentee new woodland owner perceived recreation to be a public good benefit from their wood. Most absentee owners did not want public access, and so did not view the provision of recreational opportunities as a likely public good in their woodland.

The community woodland owners, however, perceived recreational benefits to be the main public good arising from their woodlands. They also felt that the woodland improved quality of life for local people, who also gained from the landscape value of the woodlands. The value of woodland to local communities was also seen as important by other woodland owners. One resident new woodland owner commented: *"The more it is used the more it is appreciated and the more value it has."* One farm woodland owner also confessed: *"I didn't realise that this wood was so valued in the village"*, referring to a recent village survey which revealed

Table 4 Public good benefits perceived by woodland owner types

Benefit	COM	FARM	TRAD	RNWO	ANWO	TOTAL
Recreation:						
Walking	2	1	3	4	1	11
Dog walkers	2	1	1	2		6
Horse riding		1	2			3
Children	2	1				3
Scouts		1		2		3
Joggers		1				1
Neighbours				2		2
Landscape	1	1	2	2	3	9
Shooting		1	3			4
Carbon storage			1	3	3	7
Pollution absorption				1		1
Heritage		1			2	3
Future generations					2	2
Conservation/biodiversity		1	3	2	2	8
Quality of life	1			1		2

COM community woodland owner, *FARM* farmer woodland owner, *TRAD* traditional woodland owner, *RNWO* resident new woodland owner, *ANWO* absentee new woodland owner

that residents valued his wood for informal recreation most out of all the green spaces in the village. One of the traditional woodland owners was also aware of the popular recreational benefits of his woodland, such as walking, dog walking and horse riding.

Many woodland owners felt that their woods were too small to sustain high levels of public access and that allowing more visitors would harm the health of the woodland and the wildlife therein. Although happy for people to use the right of way on the edge of his woodland, one woodland owner did not wish to encourage wider public access in the wood itself:

What bothers me is that they are kicking up the wildlife. Pheasants laying eggs and we've got breeding barn owls down at the bottom and I don't like people going down and just making a noise (Resident New).

For new woodland owners who have purchased woodland as their 'private place' in the countryside, public access may be in total opposition to their motivations for ownership. These owners purchased their woodland for privacy and personal amenity. One absentee woodland owner commented:

I'm not that keen on just general public access because I don't think there would be much point in having your own private bit of woodland if other people are going to come rampaging through there. There would be no great advantage to own it really.

Owners also expressed their reticence to provide access in terms of public liability issues. With an increasingly litigious society, owners felt that there were increasing risks of the public suing them if they had an accident in their wood. As one traditional woodland owner commented:

You are making a rod for your own back, potentially. There are definitely disincentives to allowing people to roam around the woods.

A range of views therefore existed regarding the provision of public goods, especially access and recreation, in private woodlands. These results suggest that, while a number of woodland owners recognised the value of woodlands in terms of an amenity resource for local people, many did not wish to encourage public access due to conflicts with other objectives, such as wildlife or concerns over public liability.

Attitudes Towards Forest Policy

Despite the admission that the woodland owners would like to increase management in their woodlands, uptake of grant schemes amongst them was low. Out of those interviewed, only 6 were in a grant scheme (5 Woodland Grant Schemes and 1 English Nature grant scheme). Both of the farmers were in the WGS. One of the community woodlands was involved, while the other had applied but their application was rejected. The other 3 WGS holders are new woodland owners (2 resident and 1 absentee).

There was a range of views towards grant schemes, but in general woodland owners felt that in themselves the schemes were not sufficient to help owners manage their woodlands adequately. The main findings in this regard were that the schemes do not cover the cost of the work involved; applying for the schemes was too complicated and time-consuming; and schemes were too restrictive and impose constraints on the woodland owner.

Applying for the grant schemes involves preparing a management plan and extensive form-filling. Many owners felt that they did not have the expertise to complete the forms, and thus would have to seek professional help. For small land holdings this was often not economically viable, as the time and money invested in applying for the grant was not justified in terms of the sum of grant received. Even when funding was received, the amount did not cover all of the works required, and so work had to be prioritised.

There was also the feeling that involvement in grant schemes would restrict the owner in what they could do with their woodland. Compliance with the scheme regulations is required and many owners did not wish to be constrained in this way since they did not always agree with the management objectives or activities recommended by the scheme. As one traditional owner commented: *"It's our land, we want to keep it that way."* Another new resident owner explained:

Basically I don't like being controlled by the system. I'm averse to the grants that are given for stewardship, countryside stewardship, simply because of the rather Stalinist approach that they take once they offer you money. I mean we

qualified on practically every front for everything we were doing ... but I won't take the money because of the attitude and, you know, just the kind of nit-picking. And also because not everything is exactly as I think it should be done.

The above quote reveals a clear perception that by enrolling in grant schemes the woodland owner may lose control over the management of their woodland. While woodland owners did not feel that they were managing their woodlands contrary to forest policy, they evidently felt that the policies were not sufficiently sensitive to individual woodlands' needs. Each woodland is different and while many woodland owners were keen to seek professional advice they also wished to maintain control over the decision-making regarding their woodland.

Discussion

Five woodland owner types were identified based on the background characteristics of the participating woodland owners: Community Woodland Owner, Farmer Woodland Owner, Traditional Woodland Owner, Resident New Woodland Owner and Absentee New Woodland Owner. The findings suggest that these owner types have differing objectives for woodland management and attitudes towards public good delivery. These differences are discussed in this section, which is structured around three main themes: the changing nature of ownership and management in the private woodland sector; the scope for public good provision in private woodlands; and the implications and challenges for policy.

New Woodland Owners and New Woodland Management

The findings from this study have identified a range of woodland owner types with differing approaches towards woodland management and the delivery of public benefits. The study concurs with prior research that ownership is increasingly diverse, with new, more socially-oriented owners emerging that may have different attitudes to the more traditional, sometimes financially-motivated, owners. Findings suggest that the new woodland owners were motivated more by nature conservation and personal amenity than by financial gain. These owners often purchased their woodland for personal amenity and privacy, not for any investment opportunity. This finding concurs with Boon and Meilby (2005), who purport that traditional large-estate woodland owners and production-oriented owners are more likely to be concerned about the economic gains or losses from their woodland than are those owners motivated by more socially-oriented objectives, such as wildlife conservation or personal enjoyment. While production-oriented owners may be influenced to manage their woodland in a certain way if it is shown to provide financial return, the social or environmentally-focused woodland owners are more likely to be influenced by management approaches which emphasise nature conservation.

This observation is partly reflected in the findings of Hardter (2002), who further divided new woodland owners in Germany into those with a 'traditional orientation'

and those with an ‘urban orientation’, according to spatial/temporal mobility, spare time, education, interests, consumption, media/communication and personal characteristics. Hardter found that traditional owners were more likely to be concerned with timber production (not necessarily to make money, but to reduce their costs), as were some of the new woodland owners in the present study. These owners were often older and retired, and therefore had more time to carry out some of the management work themselves. The urban owner was more consumption-oriented, enjoying the personal amenity benefits of owning woodland. Since these owners worked outside of their woodland, they did not have much time for hands on woodland management. While the findings of the present study confirm that new woodland owners are varied in their ability to carry out management works themselves, they question whether this can be attributed to a dichotomous traditional or urban orientation. In fact, the age and work status of woodland owners was shown to be a more likely determining factor in whether or not woodland owners can carry out management works themselves. This, of course, may evolve with life cycle stages, with owners becoming potentially more active in their woodland when they retire. The ability of those interviewed to carry out the work themselves was also dependent on whether the owner lived close to the woodland; those who were not resident found it more difficult to carry out the work themselves. Hardter (2002) states that the urban owner is less likely to be concerned with the economic benefit of woodland management. However, the present findings suggest that this lack of concern for an economic return on the woodland may be because urban owners are less interested in carrying out much management and so incur less cost.

This study suggests that those woodland owners who carry out the majority of management in their woodland themselves also gain much personal enjoyment out of such activities. Those interviewed stated that as well as being a cost-effective method of getting the management done (as suggested by Tornqvist 1995), it was also a hobby. Other studies suggest various reasons why woodland owners like to manage their woodland themselves; amongst other things it can help reduce stress, provide a challenging alternative to their job, be a form of self-expression, and provide evidence of an activity that will outlive the owner (Bliss and Martin 1989). Certainly there is a strong degree of pride in creating and maintaining a well-kept forest (Tornqvist 1995).

As has been suggested in this paper, a more complete understanding of the ‘non-agricultural forest owner’ or the ‘new’ woodland owner is required. Indeed, the finding indicate that new woodland owners are diverse and motivated by a range of objectives. These may be rooted in their own rural experiences or arise as a reaction to their urban existence. In terms of policy formulation, classifying woodland owners as ‘agricultural’ or ‘non-agricultural’ is, evidently, limiting and does not explicitly identify the myriad of motivations and objectives associated with the rising wave of new woodland owners. Issues such as the size of woodland holding, location of the woodland, management objectives and owner motivations all affect, to varying degrees, the ability of woodland owners to deliver public good benefits. In light of this, the following section discusses whether enhanced public good

delivery in private woodlands is a realistic goal or whether it is likely to remain political rhetoric.

Public Good Provision in the Private Sector—Rhetoric or Reality?

With their less productive and more altruistic motivations for woodland management, it would seem, on the surface at least, that the new woodland owners may be well placed to deliver public good benefits. Most of the owners interviewed in this study, especially the new woodland owners, stated that timber production was not a primary motivation for management. The activities carried out by those interviewed, such as coppicing, ride maintenance, control of invasive species, replanting, thinning and pruning can all enhance those public good values. However, while the environmental objectives and management activities of these private woodland owners may pre-dispose them to providing certain public goods, they may be unable, or unwilling, to provide others, especially recreation.

The majority of the woodland owners in this study indicated a reluctance to increase public access in their woodlands. There are two possible reasons for this. Firstly, the woodland owner may wish to maintain exclusive personal use of the woodland, as suggested by Slee (2006) and vocalised by several of the new woodland owners interviewed in this study. Secondly, since many of the woodland owners in this study were managing their woodland with the primary objective of nature conservation, they were often reluctant to increase public access for fear of disturbing the wildlife. In this case, there was a conflict between the social and environmental benefits of woodland, as opposed to the marketable versus non-marketable conflict of timber production.

Thus, it would be appropriate to further explore private woodland owners, especially new woodland owners, willingness to deliver public goods. It may be that certain types of woodland owner are better placed and more willing to deliver certain types of public good benefits. The spatial location and scale of a woodland is also an important consideration when determining its ability to deliver public goods. Although large woodlands near to urban areas are likely to have a higher recreational value, the availability of substitute recreational sites nearby is also likely to be a factor. Woodlands which are less accessible may offer important habitats for wildlife. Similarly, landscape values will be higher for woodlands that are more visible. However, location is likely to be less important for carbon storage values.

The initial indications regarding the public good benefits delivered through private woodlands outlined in this paper pose some interesting questions which need to be further researched, and if possible quantified. The following section discusses the potential implications of the findings for policy and makes some suggestions with respect to fostering the delivery of public good benefits in private woodlands.

The Challenge for Policy—Intervention or Market Pull?

The findings outlined in this paper suggest that woodland owners have a desire to manage their woodlands. While recent studies suggest that appropriate management

of woodlands can have a positive impact on public good outputs, especially biodiversity (Kirby et al. 2005; Amar et al. 2006; Slee et al. 2006, many woodlands in Britain are currently under- or unmanaged (especially broadleaved woodland in England), at least in terms of what might be regarded as ‘best practice’. Nevertheless, if woodland owners do indeed want to manage their woodlands, then why are so many currently under-managed? The owners approached in this study revealed that their management activities were tempered by time and resources. Since timber values have been low, the economic benefits from woodland management have been negligible. Slee (2006) asserts that unless this gap between public good and private profitability (or even simply breaking even) is overcome we will continue to see a reduction in public good values.

In an economic analysis of forestry policy in England, CJC Consulting (2003) asserted that there is no evidence to support government intervention in timber production. However, although the production of timber itself may not incur public good benefits, its associated activities may well have a positive impact on these public goods. Indeed, CJC Consulting (2003) advise that any government intervention for timber must demonstrate a high return of public good delivery. Many woodland owners in this study expressed their desire to manage their woodlands better, especially if there was a market for their wood products. This concurs with Church et al. (2005) who showed that private woodland owners are more interested in boosting the commercial potential of their woodland through appropriate incentives than in increasing public access.

Thus, perhaps stimulating the market for timber or other wood products is a more appropriate form of government intervention than subsidies. While subsidies can support some woodland management in a market failure situation, it is required on a continuing basis in order to maintain the level of public good delivered. With the likely increase in energy requirements from wood fuel (due to the rise in fossil fuels prices) and the government’s commitment to increasing the renewable energy sector (FC 2007), there is a potentially growing market for low-grade timber from England’s woodlands.

Conclusions

Three main findings have emerged which contribute to the wider theoretical debate on ownership, public goods and motivations. First, ownership objectives are likely to influence the ability of private woodlands to deliver public good benefits, with owners having socially- or environmentally-oriented goals being more inclined to deliver public good benefits than financially-oriented owners. Second, public good provision is likely to be spatially variable in terms of the scale and location of woodlands, with larger woodlands and those close to centres of population likely to have higher public good value. Third, alongside government incentive schemes, market mechanisms present an effective means of stimulating sustainable woodland management. Many woodland owners in this study indicated that they would manage their woodland better if there was a viable market for wood products.

While many private woodland owners may have a desire to manage their woodlands effectively, the challenge for policy makers is to overcome the barriers that exist between the willingness of private woodland owners to manage their woodlands and its implementation. In order to help achieve this, it would be appropriate to build on these exploratory findings and construct a classification or typology of private woodland owners in the UK, based on their willingness or ability to deliver public goods. Such a classification would help inform policymakers on the appropriate mechanisms for stimulating woodland management for enhanced public good provision according to different owner types. Alongside the spatial considerations of woodland scale and distribution, ownership objectives and motivations are likely to be increasingly fundamental to the successful implementation of forest policy.

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